



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

277

March 25, 2014

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: GN Docket No. 14-25 – FCC Process Reform; Publicly Searchable Online
Consumer Complaints Database

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We write to urge the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to expeditiously take steps to create a publicly searchable online consumer complaints database that can be accessed from the homepage of the Commission's website.

Although the Commission annually receives about 400,000 consumer complaints and other public inquiries through its website and other means, complaint data are only made public on a very limited basis. Moreover, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found in 2009 that the complaint numbers may be low because many consumers are not aware of the Commission's complaint filing process and procedures.¹ GAO also highlighted that the Commission lacks measures to effectively resolve problems through its consumer complaint process.

We believe a searchable and user-friendly consumer complaints database will enhance transparency, help the FCC empower consumers, and spur greater innovation in the telecommunications marketplace. Furthermore, improving the collection and disclosure of consumer complaint information could help the Commission identify emerging issues, as well as inform its enforcement and policymaking activities.

Our request is consistent with a recent recommendation of the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee, which asked the Commission to "utilize an online database to give public access to non-identifiable consumer complaints and aggregated data." The committee further wrote that:

¹ Government Accountability Office. *Telecommunications: Preliminary Observations about Consumer Satisfaction and Problems with Wireless Phone Service and FCC's Efforts to Assist Consumers with Complaints (GAO-09-800T)*, June 17, 2009, available at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/130/122792.pdf>.

Improvements to complaint data reporting at the FCC could reduce costs for the agency in the long term, assist in its regulatory efforts, and make the FCC a leader in openness and making information available to the public. This effort would also improve public involvement and support of the agency's efforts.²

The Consumer Advisory Committee also highlighted the example of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's consumer complaints database. Other Federal agency examples include the Consumer Product Safety Commission's *SaferProducts.gov* website and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's *safercar.gov* website.

We believe this action has bipartisan support at the Commission. In response to questions for the record submitted in connection with a September 11, 2013 Senate hearing, three current FCC Commissioners all expressed support for making more consumer data publicly available.³ Commissioner Mignon Clyburn noted that helping consumers is a top priority and that improving the complaint process could benefit consumers. Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel wrote that the Commission could upgrade its consumer complaint process and "should consider making its data more open, in machine-readable formats, and if possible, with APIs and common metadata tagging schemes." Commissioner Ajit Pai further recommended that the Commission publish an online dashboard that, among other things, allows consumers to evaluate how well the Commission resolves complaints.

More recently, an FCC working group's report on FCC reform recommended making complaint and inquiry data more readily accessible and understandable to the public. In the report, FCC staff noted that a searchable consumer complaint database "has the potential to facilitate better overall outcomes for consumers."⁴

A searchable online database of consumer complaints will facilitate FCC transparency, benefit consumers, and ensure that all stakeholders have information about current trends in the telecommunications marketplace. Therefore, we urge you to take action to implement this database as soon as possible.

² Federal Communications Commission. *FCC Consumer Advisory Committee Recommendation Regarding Reporting of Consumer Complaint Data*, December 16, 2013, available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-325347A1.pdf.

³ Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government. *Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Request for the Federal Communications Commission*, September 11, 2013, available at <http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/webcasts.cfm?method=webcasts.view&id=0fe936d4-087a-4f6d-832f-10ca1a2e1696>.

⁴ Federal Communications Commission. *Report on FCC Process Reform, Recommendation 2.17, GN Docket No. 14-25*, February 14, 2014, available at http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2014/db0214/DA-14-199A2.pdf.

The Honorable Tom Wheeler

March 25, 2014

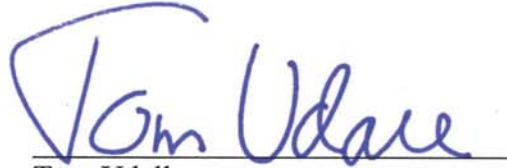
Page 3

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important consumer protection measure. We look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bill Nelson
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Udall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "T" at the beginning.

Tom Udall
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Mignon Clyburn, Commissioner
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner
The Honorable Ajit Pai, Commissioner
The Honorable Michael O'Reilly, Commissioner



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

April 3, 2014

The Honorable Tom Udall
United States Senate
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Udall:

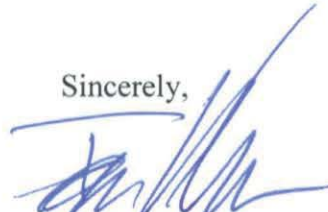
Thank you for your letter recommending that the Commission take steps to create a publicly searchable online consumer complaints database. I fully agree with you and others, including the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee, who have urged that the FCC's consumer complaint website needs to be more user-friendly, and that more information on complaint data be made public and searchable. Addressing this issue is a priority for me, and as your letter noted, the other Commissioners have each indicated they see the same need.

Upon joining the Commission, I ordered a comprehensive review of the FCC's processes to further the goal of having the agency operate in the most effective, efficient and transparent way possible. As you note, a proposal to make complaint and inquiry data more readily accessible and understandable to the public was among the more than 150 process reform recommendations contained in the Report on Process Reform. The Commission sought public comment on the Report's proposed recommendations, and staff is now reviewing the record.

As part of the process reform initiative, Commission staff has already been working on a concrete plan to revamp not only our consumer complaint website, but also the entire consumer complaint process to make it more user-friendly, efficient and transparent. Last week, Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau staff briefed the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee on its initiative to improve the consumer interface and move the agency's complaint process toward greater transparency in the amount of information made public. Commission staff will continue to work with interested parties as we implement these important process improvements. My goal is to have a new consumer complaint system in place by the end of the year, including a new searchable database and access to more comprehensive data on consumer complaints.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

April 3, 2014

The Honorable Bill Nelson
United States Senate
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Nelson:

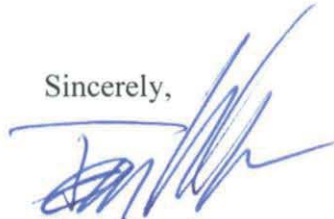
Thank you for your letter recommending that the Commission take steps to create a publicly searchable online consumer complaints database. I fully agree with you and others, including the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee, who have urged that the FCC's consumer complaint website needs to be more user-friendly, and that more information on complaint data be made public and searchable. Addressing this issue is a priority for me, and as your letter noted, the other Commissioners have each indicated they see the same need.

Upon joining the Commission, I ordered a comprehensive review of the FCC's processes to further the goal of having the agency operate in the most effective, efficient and transparent way possible. As you note, a proposal to make complaint and inquiry data more readily accessible and understandable to the public was among the more than 150 process reform recommendations contained in the Report on Process Reform. The Commission sought public comment on the Report's proposed recommendations, and staff is now reviewing the record.

As part of the process reform initiative, Commission staff has already been working on a concrete plan to revamp not only our consumer complaint website, but also the entire consumer complaint process to make it more user-friendly, efficient and transparent. Last week, Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau staff briefed the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee on its initiative to improve the consumer interface and move the agency's complaint process toward greater transparency in the amount of information made public. Commission staff will continue to work with interested parties as we implement these important process improvements. My goal is to have a new consumer complaint system in place by the end of the year, including a new searchable database and access to more comprehensive data on consumer complaints.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler